

## Greenwood/Leflore County Mississippi

### Greenwood/Leflore County Profile

Greenwood, Mississippi is located in Leflore County, in a part of the region known as the Lower Mississippi River Delta. Although Leflore County is steeped in agrarian history and agriculture continues to be important, the county's nonfarming private sector economy is driven by manufacturing, retail trade and services. In 1998 there were an estimated 21,081 full-time and part-time employees in the county, with approximately 21 percent in manufacturing, 15 percent in retail and 20 percent in services. The comparison to Mississippi is shown in the following table:

1998

Employees in	Leflore	Mississippi
Manuf'ing	21%	17%
Retail Trade	15%	16%
Services	20%	24%

There were approximately 887 businesses in Leflore County in 1997, with an estimated 28 percent in retail trade, 35 percent in services and 1 percent in manufacturing. Most businesses employed less than 20 people.

In 1998, the population of Leflore County was estimated at 37,241 with about 57 percent of the population employed full-time or part-time. In 1998, about 56 percent of the county's population were between the ages of 18 and 64. In 1999, the unemployment rate estimated average was 8.4 percent (5.4 percent in the state). Estimated per capita income for Leflore County was

\$11,463 in 1988 (\$11,695 for the state) and \$17,915 in 1998 (\$19,776 for the state).

Population decreased approximately 3 percent between 1988 and 1998. In 1996, the population was 37 percent white and 62 percent black. In 1990, educational attainment in Leflore County for persons 25 years and over was 55 percent for high school graduates (compared to 64 percent for the state) and 16 percent for college graduates (compared to 15 percent for the state).

### The Mississippi Workshop

Over 30 individuals from Clarksdale, Cleveland, Greenwood and surrounding areas participated in TEAM DelTA's Workshop, held May 23rd in Cleveland, Miss. The workshop offered information about how to create more local wealth and higher-paying jobs and about the emerging technology-based economy. Participants provided TEAM DelTA with a better understanding of regional needs, concerns and the kinds of local technology-based economic development currently underway. Participants also completed questionnaires giving their opinions about the usefulness of specified topics and the amount of technology-based economic development strategic planning already taking place in their communities.

Participants had this to say about Mississippi's Delta region:

### Strengths and Opportunities

- Import (e.g. tourism) & Export (e.g., culture food, music, art)
- Good natural resources, location, inexpensive power
- Have local quality innovative companies
- Build clusters - life sciences, metal
- Broad access to community colleges (MDCC, CCC), good high school programs, responsive universities (MVSU, DSU)
- Have people and can increase skilled-labor pool via training investments

### Challenges

- Overcome negative perceptions about Miss., the Delta & the ability/capability of Delta people
- Fear or resistance to change (new processes, products, technology)
- Lack of emerging and/or youth leadership; leader development, work ethics & life skills programs
- Workforce development – (need more people with basic skills & technically capable workforce)
- Soft Infrastructure – more family entertainment, retail, health care
- Locating & keeping educated/trained people
- Lack of access to capital

### Participant Response to Questionnaire

At the state regional level, participant responses to the workshop questionnaire indicate that **information about these topics would be most useful:**

- Concept of value-added,
- Role of technology & innovation

- Clusters and networks
- Workforce skills
- Social capital

Participants gave the **lowest topic usefulness ratings to:**

- Globalization, Traded sector(s)
- Participants indicated they knew of very little over-all action planning.

Improving K-12 education was the only topic perceived as having high amounts of planning throughout the region. However, some planning was identifying for each community (e.g., incubators, networks, training).

## The Community Technology Assessment

TEAM DeLTA held the community technology assessment meeting for the Greenwood community on July 12, 2000. The goals of the assessment were to identify the community's general perspectives and priorities on technology-based economic development and gain a better understanding of the key organizations and structure in the area. Fourteen individuals in formal or informal leadership positions in the community, or who offered key information, participated in the facilitated discussion to identify a potential vision for Greenwood; priorities for technology-based economic development; and, (1) high value-adding companies, (2) suppliers and support businesses, (3) soft infrastructure entities and (4) elements of physical infrastructure in the Greenwood area. Gaps in the four layers were also identified.

**Participants wrote a brief description of what they wanted Greenwood to "be good at or known for" – Here's the result:** "to be known as a sustainable community with racial harmony, hospitality, educated marketable and talented people, economic stability for all; and that promotes and retains industry, uses current technology, attracts tourism, strengthens agri-businesses, is an established distribution crossroads and a retail destination."

Participants were given a hypothetical pot of money for technology-based economic development and asked how they would **prioritize economic development spending over the next year** in the areas of: recruiting outside industry, helping locally-owned existing businesses, starting new locally-owned businesses, workforce development and education, technology transfer and financial investment. **Listed below are participant priorities:**

- Existing business 45% of \$
- Workforce & ed. 38% of \$
- Technology transfer 36% of \$
- New businesses 30% of \$
- Financial invest 26% of \$
- Recruiting 25% of \$

**When asked if the Internet is changing everything, the consensus was** the internet brings resources, choices and information to isolated places; provides the method for limitless learning; offers financial avenues, breaks the curve for supply and demand. Concern was expressed about the digital divide – bridging educational, career and societal gaps between the computer-literate "haves and have nots." People should "not forget how to do a task by hand and meet with others." One participant wrote, "The basic principles of life will never change: God, family, values of character. The internet does not change our basic needs, just how we acquire them."

**To find the existing technology resources and gaps in resources,** participants compiled four long lists of (1) **Key firms** (included were Viking Corporation, John Richard Company, Irving Automotive, Greenwood Leflore Hospital,; Staplco); (2) **Support organizations** or businesses, which contribute to the success of key firms by offering supplies, services or other support (included were Greenwood Utilities, Mississippi Valley State University, Bellsouth, K-12 ed. local banks); (3) **Soft**

**infrastructure** (included were restaurants, hunting/fishing clubs, economic development organizations, sports events/organizations, volunteer organizations); and, (4) **Hard infrastructure** (access to E/W 4-lane hwy, 30-minutes from U.S. Interstate, a rail line, some CIT infrastructure, seasonal water transport, an airport that could accommodate small jet commercial service, state park). Note: a few critical organizations fell in several lists.

Participants were asked to estimate the perceived involvement (connectivity) among the organizations identified above. Their responses indicate the **community resources perceived to be the most interconnected are** the educational entities, E/D organizations, telephone & utilities, hospital, Viking Range, banks, sports & volunteer organizations. This group could provide the core for more detailed planning and implementation to achieve a community technology strategy and for pulling the community together to implement action.

**Resource gaps or needed improvements include:** port access, four-lane N/S route & N/E link, high-speed cost-effective communication access, retail (grocery, clothes), recreational & entertainment facilities/events, flexible day care, housing, public transportation.

## Possible Next Steps

- Form a detailed Community Technology Plan (including CIT infrastructure, training needs, aggregating demand strategies);
- Explore/pursue building clusters & networks, technology business incubator, accessing capital;
- Explore potential business or other opportunities to fill resource gaps;
- Form area alliances & work to raise awareness about technology, entrepreneurship & support, seize identified opportunities & reduce resource gaps.